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AUTHOR Jackson, Jerlando F. L.; Mathews, Jerry G.
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ABSTRACT

Auburn University's Office of Minority Advancement, in conjunction with Auburn Junior High School, implemented a joint program to assist at-risk African-American male students while at Auburn Junior High School. Using the help of faculty and trained college student mentors, the Success in Reading Program was designed to enhance successful matriculation of minorities into Auburn High School. Auburn University faculty members conducted monthly seminars that addressed such issues as social skills, study strategies, learning skills, and career counseling. Student mentors guided mentees through the program. A summer program offered expert instruction and emphasized age-appropriate sports instruction and skills development as well as instruction in alcohol/drug abuse prevention, nutrition, personal health, career opportunities, and job responsibilities. Each mentee was tracked throughout the program. Evaluation involved survey questionnaires. Each mentee, mentor, and guest speaker completed a survey questionnaire during one seminar session and again, later, by mail. The evaluation examined the effectiveness of recruitment methods, mentoring workshops, and the mentoring process. Results indicated that the program was able to help retain at-risk African-American males in the public schools. The program made a positive impact on mentees' lives. Mentors believed the program was planned and implemented in an organized way. Guest speakers also considered the program effective. The surveys and a participant letter are appended. (SM)

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An Evaluation of the Target Success Mentor Program

Jerlando F. L. Jackson

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Iowa State University

and

Jerry G. Mathews

Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology

Auburn University

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Abstract

Auburn University's Office of Minority Advancement, in conjunction with Auburn Junior High School, has implemented a joint program to assist "at risk" African-American male students while at Auburn Junior High School. Together with the assistance of faculty and student mentors, this project is designed to enhance successful matriculation of minorities into Auburn High School. Auburn University faculty members were used to conduct monthly seminars and the student mentors guided the mentees through the program. A program of this nature can ultimately increase the quality of life for African-American males in the city of Auburn. Through exposure to one-on-one mentoring, Enrichment Seminars, and the college atmosphere a mentee can develop the skills necessary to enter an institution of higher education.

Evaluation

Throughout the period of this program, each mentee was tracked during their matriculation in the program. Evaluation was managed by utilizing survey questionnaires. Each mentee and mentor was administered a survey questionnaire upon exiting the program to ascertain feedback that will assist us in preparing future mentees/mentors. The effectiveness of recruitment methods, mentoring workshops, and additionally, the mentoring process was evaluated.

An Evaluation of the Target Success Mentor Program

One of the fastest growing populations in public schools today is the "at-risk" population. Each school district has different requirements to be classified as "at-risk." These requirements include:

> . . . elementary or secondary students who run the risk of dropping out of school and acquiring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to become successful adults . . . students who behave in ways that put them at risk of not achieving . . . (not engaging in classroom and school activities, using drugs and alcohol, committing disruptive and delinquent acts, becoming pregnant, dropping out, or attempting suicide) . . . students whose family background and home and community conditions (e.g., poverty, low parental education) correlates with low achievement and lack of success in school. (Lund, 1992, p. 14)

However, the group that frequently receives this label possess the following characteristics: African-American males from low-income backgrounds, with low academic achievement, and continuing discipline problems. By examining the characteristics, one could easily conclude that a large number of inner-city African-American males would receive this classification. Furthermore, it would be very easy for any African-American male to be phased into this category. Moreover, students that are "at-risk" tend to be in and out of school due to disciplinary punishment such as suspension or expulsion. This ultimately leads to school dropout and life in the "streets." At this point many will resort to some form of violence, which in turn contributes to the high level of violence that America experiences today.

It is very important that special attention be given to this issue to help salvage the African-American male. Mentoring programs could be introduced into the public schools to target this special population (Evans, 1992). The programs will equip the "at-risk" students with the skills necessary to succeed in matriculating through the public school system. A program of this nature

could ultimately increase the probability that this population enters an institution of higher education and decrease the likelihood of resorting to violence. The implementation of the mentoring program is an attempt to address these issues. The program was designed as a result of the prevalent problems stated above. The program development was requested from the public schools to aid their endeavor in combatting this problem.

Program Description

A. Objectives of the Program

The primary objective of this program is to aid in the retention of "at risk" African-American males at Auburn Junior High School. We expect to increase participation in the following manner:

1) Provide those minority students at Auburn Junior High in the program with mentors from the University. The mentors will interact with the mentees on a weekly basis.
2) Provide corresponding workshops held at the University to increase academic, social, and personal skills. These workshops will be conducted by faculty on a monthly basis.
3) Provide summer programs that will give the students an opportunity to continue progress in the program during the summer months.
4) Evaluate the recruitment and retention strategies of the program to assess which methods are most effective.

B. Mentor/Mentee Relationship

The Office of Minority Advancement will recruit mentors from the minority population at Auburn University. Upon selection, mentors will be trained and provided a handbook on effective mentoring. The mentors will then begin their weekly visits with the mentees at the Junior High School. This interaction will provide the mentee with a role model and real life examples to follow.

C. University Workshops

The program will consist of monthly workshops conducted by minority faculty and staff. The mentees will attend these sessions on campus to give them more exposure to Auburn University. The workshops will address issues such as: social skills, study strategies, learning skills, career counseling, etc.

D. Summer Program

The National Youth Sports Program (NYSP) is a partnership that enlists the support of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the nation's college and university National Collegiate Athletic Association. The program offers expert instruction and emphasizes age-appropriate sports instruction and skills development. NYSP also helps youths develop personal and social skills through its educational programming. The staff provides instruction in alcohol and other drug prevention, nutrition and personal health, career opportunities and job responsibilities, and other topics relevant to the community.

E. Impact of the Program

Over the next four to six years, the program's goal is to increase the retention rate of "at risk" African-Americans in Auburn's Public Schools. With the support from the community, the Office of Minority Advancement can recruit, train, and give direction to the "at risk" African-American students. Thus, support for the program will impact the number of minorities graduating in the Auburn Public School System.

Method

Participants

Nineteen African American adolescent males in Junior High School between the ages of 13 and 16 were selected to participate as mentees. The criterion used to make this selection was that all African American males at Auburn Junior High in the Success Reading Program would participate. Permission for students to participate in the program was authorized by parents of the participants

and the Auburn City School District. The students that were enrolled in the Success Reading Program were deemed "at-risk." The students in the Success Reading Program scored in the first or second stanine in the reading sub-test of the Stanford Achievement Test. However, data were only collected on 11 mentees (six seventh graders and five eighth graders) with the remaining eight students either in suspension or boot camp. Nineteen African American male university students (13 undergraduate and six graduate between the ages of 18 and 30) volunteered to participate as mentors. Four African American male university personnel (one administrator, one faculty, and two staff) agreed to conduct Enrichment Seminars. Participants were treated in accordance with the "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct" (American Psychological Association, 1992). No participant names or other identifying characteristics were used in reporting the results of the study.

Instrumentation

Three survey questionnaires were used to gather data. They were administered to the mentees, mentors, and guest speakers. The survey was developed based on research by Upcraft, and Schuh (1996) on performing assessment and evaluations. The items are directly related to program perception, benefits, intellectual progress, frequency of interaction between the mentees and mentors, personal development, mentor-mentee compatibility, and the likelihood of future participation. The questionnaires contain between seven and eight items based on a likert scale with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. A comment section was also included (see Appendix A).

Procedure

The surveys were administered in one seminar session and one mail out. In the seminar session, participants filled out survey questionnaires that took approximately three minutes. These responses were used to determine baseline data on the effectiveness of The Target Success Mentor Program (see the Results section).

During the first session the questionnaires were administered to the mentees by the Success Reading Teacher at Auburn Junior High. At the beginning of the session, the purpose of the study was explained to each mentee. In the session the Success Reading Teacher walked the mentees through the questionnaire as to alleviate any uncertainties about the items. This process was executed one question at a time. At the end of the session, the questionnaires were collected then forwarded to The Office of Minority Advancement. All 11 questionnaires were usable.

The questionnaires for the mentors and guest speakers were administered by mail. A letter was included with the questionnaires explaining the evaluation and its purpose (see Appendix B). After completing the questionnaires, participants mailed them back to The Office of Minority Advancement. Of the 19 questionnaires returned, by the mentors, 18 were usable for analysis.

Results

Table 1 includes summaries of mentee response mean scores relating to perceptions of indicators on the questionnaire. Indicators were ranked high by the mentees on perception of the mentor program overall (M = 4.64) and enrichment seminars (M =4.55).

Table 1
Mean Perception Responses of Mentees to Survey Indicators

Indicator	Mean	Mode
	Mentees (n = 11)	
Perception	4.64	5.00
Beneficial	3.55	3.00
Intellectual	3.73	5.00
Contacts	2.91	Multiple (2.00, 3.00 and 5.00)
Personal	3.18	Multiple (1.00, 4.00 and 5.00)
Seminars	4.55	5.00
Compatible	3.91	5.00
Future	-----	YES

Note. Likert scale items ranged from 1 (low) to 5 (high).

The mean perception scores for the mentors are summarized in Table 2. Indicators were ranked high by the mentors on perception of the mentor program overall (M = 4.50), how beneficial the program was (M =4.44), and mentor training (M =4.39).

Table 2
Mean Perception Responses of Mentors to Survey Indicators

Indicator	Mean	Mode
	Mentors (n = 18)	
Perception	4.50	Multiple
Beneficial	4.44	5.00
Contacts	3.72	4.00
Compatible	4.00	4.00
Training	4.39	4.00
Informed	-----	YES
Future	-----	YES

Note. Likert scale items ranged from 1 (low) to 5 (high).

Table 3 includes summaries of guest speakers' response mean scores relating to perception of indicators on the questionnaire. Indicators were ranked high by the guest speakers on perception of the mentor program overall (M = 4.75), appropriateness of the seminar (M = 4.75), sufficient notice for preparation (M = 5.00) and if participation in the program was a pleasant experience (M =4.67).

Table 3
Mean Perception Responses of Guest Speakers to Survey Indicators

Indicator	Mean	Mode
	Guest Speakers (n = 4)	
Perception	4.75	5.00
Appropriate	4.75	5.00
Receptive	3.75	4.00
Notice	5.00	5.00
Experience	4.67	5.00
Future	-----	YES
Recommend	-----	YES

Note. Likert scale items ranged from 1 (low) to 5 (high).

In order to answer the research question regarding effectiveness of programming for at-risk students, Mann-Whitney U tests for independent samples were utilized on the combined data set (mentor and mentee) for the common indicators to determine if any statistically significant differences existed between the perceptions of mentees and mentors relating to the indicators in the survey. The indicators included: whether the program was beneficial, number of contacts, likelihood of future participation, and perception of program. An alpha level of .05 was employed. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Mean Ranked Scores, U Statistics, and Probabilities for Mentor and Mentee Perception Indicators

Indicator	Mean Ranks		U	p
	Mentee (n = 11)	Mentor (n = 18)		
Perception	16.23	14.25	85.5	.550
Benefit	10.18	17.94	46.0	.016*
Contacts	11.59	17.08	61.5	.092
Future	14.0	13.19	75.0	.816

Note. * $p < .05$

Discussion and Implications

The present data collected on The Target Success Mentor Program confirms its ability to aid in the retention of "at-risk" African-American males in the public schools. The data obtained will be useful with implementing program improvements that in turn will assist with the successful matriculation of the mentees through the public school system. However, on some of the indicators I do question the mentees ability to accurately yield appropriate information. The difficulty of determining several indicators must be noted. In many cases it is difficult for the mentees to see the progress they have made. Nonetheless, their data is an important variable for the scope of this research. It allows one to get a true insight into the "mentee's world."

Data responses for the mentees indicated that the program made a positive impact on their lives. The mentees scored a mean of 3 or higher on all indicators except one. The one indicator that did not score a three or better was the frequency of contacts with mentor. Furthermore, they scored a mode of 5 on six of eight indicators. One indicator having multiple modes.

The mentor data summary conveyed that the program was planned and implemented in an organized manner. The mentors scored a mean of 3.5 or higher on all indicators. While scoring a mode of 5 on four of seven indicators, with one having multiple modes.

The data collected on the guest speakers signify the effectiveness of the program. The respondents scored a mean of 3.5 or higher on all indicators on the questionnaire survey. A mode of 5 was scored on six of seven indicators.

The combined set data measured four indicators: perception, benefit, number of contacts, and future participation. There were no significant difference in the indicators in common except benefit. There was a significant difference in the level of benefit between the mentors and mentees. The mentors scored their level of benefit higher than the mentees. This outcome focuses back to a statement made earlier, it is difficult for the mentees to determine their level of benefit.

The results have a direct implication on how the program will be implemented in the future. Each indicator of the individual data sets will be addressed by using the findings to refine that component of the program. The combined data set will be utilized as a baseline to determine future progress of the program and its participants. Given the need to address the issue of helping "at-risk" students to become proficient and confident with their work in schools, this program and programs like it are important. This research provides information that will improve interactions with "at-risk" students and provide guidance for the implementation of similar programs.

References

Evans, T. W. (1992). Mentors. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Guides.

Lund, L. (1992). Corporate mentoring in the U.S. schools: The outstretched hand. New York, NY: The Conference Board, Inc.

Upcraft, M. L., & Schuh, J. H. (1996). Assessment in student affairs: A guide for practitioners. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Appendix A

The Target Success Mentor Program
Survey

Mentee

Age: _____ Grade Level: _____

Instruction: Choose the response that best represents your experience, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest.

1. Your perception of The Target Success Mentor Program.

1 2 3 4 5

2. Was the program beneficial to you?

1 2 3 4 5

3. Did you experience any intellectual progress?

1 2 3 4 5

4. The frequency of contacts with mentor?

1 2 3 4 5

5. Did you experience any personal development from interaction with mentor?

1 2 3 4 5

6. Was the Enrichment Seminars beneficial?

1 2 3 4 5

7. Were you and your mentor compatible?

1 2 3 4 5

8. If given the opportunity would you continue the program?

yes _____ no _____

Comments: _____
_____
_____

Target Success Mentor Program
Survey

Mentor

Age: _____ Classification: _____

Instructions: Choose the response that best represents your experience, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest.

1. Your perception of The Target Success Mentor Program.

1 2 3 4 5

2. Was the program beneficial to you?

1 2 3 4 5

3. The frequency of contacts with mentee?

1 2 3 4 5

4. Were you and your mentee compatible?

1 2 3 4 5

5. Do you feel that you received adequate training to be a mentor?

1 2 3 4 5

6. Were you kept abreast of up coming activities?

yes ____ no _____

7. If given the opportunity would you continue the program?

yes _____ no _____

Comments: _____
_____
_____

Target Success Mentor Program
Survey

Guest Speaker

Instructions: Choose the response that best represents your experience, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest.

1. Your perception of The Target Success Mentor Program.

1 2 3 4 5

2. Do you feel your Enrichment Seminar was appropriate?

1 2 3 4 5

3. Were the mentees receptive to your information?

1 2 3 4 5

4. Were you given sufficient notice to prepare for your seminar?

1 2 3 4 5

5. Did you have a pleasant experience with the program?

1 2 3 4 5

6. If given the opportunity would you do another Enrichment Seminar?

yes _____ no _____

7. Would you recommend participating in the program to a colleague?

yes _____ no _____

Comments: _____
_____
_____

Appendix B

Auburn University

Auburn University, Alabama 36849-5158

Office of Minority Advancement
100 Samford Hall

Telephone: (334) 844-4184
Fax: (334) 844-4445

May 27, 1997

Dear Participant:

I would like to thank you for your hard work and efforts given to the Target Success Program. Because of you, this has been a successful pilot year.

I am in the process of evaluating the program in order to obtain information that will help us make it more effective next year. I would appreciate it if you would take a few minutes to fill out the enclosed survey and return it to me at the address above.

Once again, thank you for your participation and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Jerlando Jackson
University Coordinator

Enclosure